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Short communication

The first documented breeding record of White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* (Lichtenstein, 1823) in Georgia

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Abstract

This paper reports the first documented breeding record of the White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* in Georgia, with additional information on its status in Georgia and in the adjacent countries.

Key words: Avifauna, Breeding, Georgia, White-tailed Lapwing

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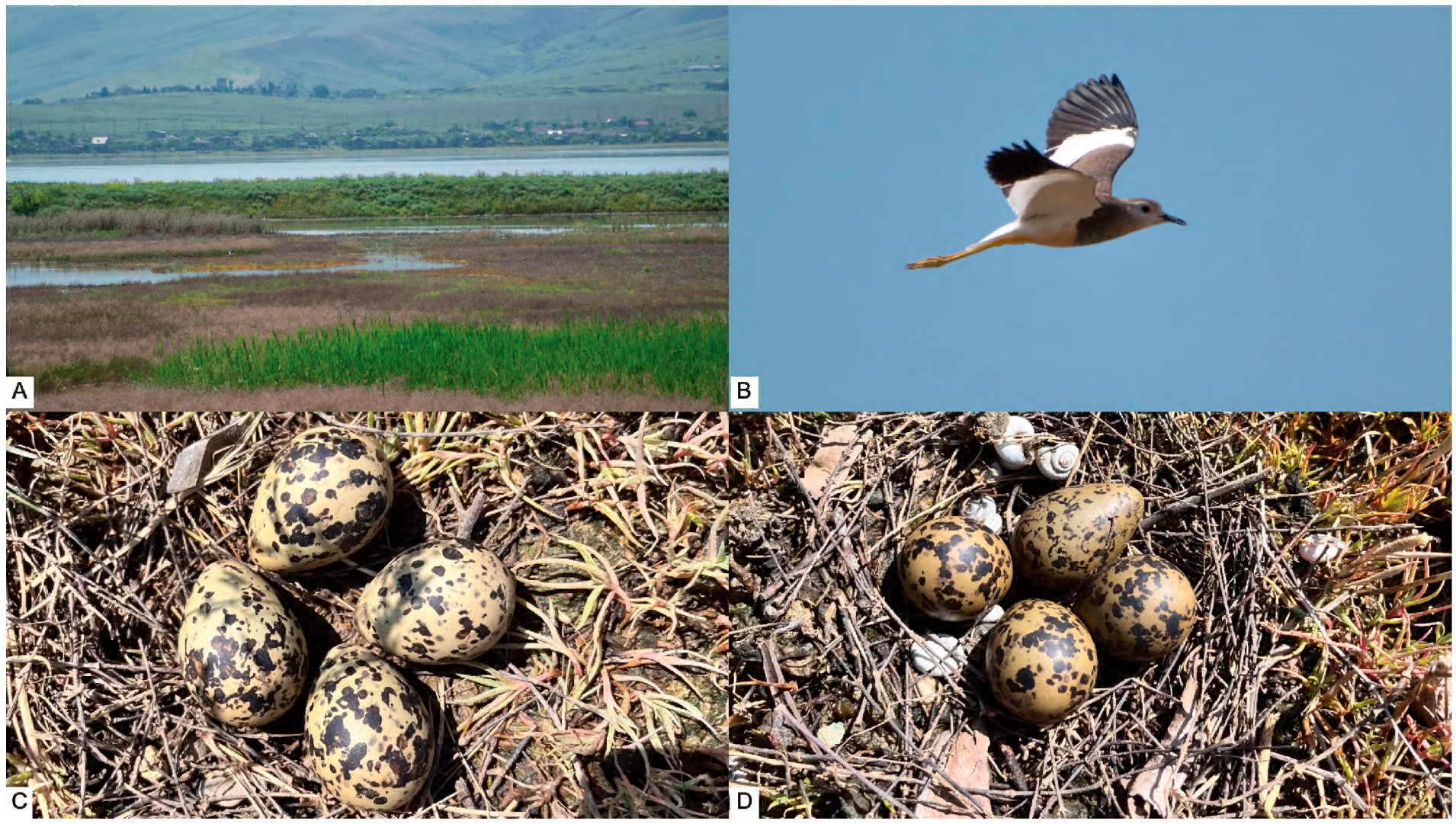
Introduction

The White-tailed Lapwing (Fig. 1B) is a medium-sized shorebird mainly found in parts of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East (central and south-east Türkiye, east Syria, and Jordan, north-east through Azerbaijan and Transcaspia to Lake Balkhash-southeastern Kazakhstan, and south-east through Iraq and Iran to west Pakistan). It has a distinctive appearance with a pale, brownish-grey body, white underparts, a prominent white tail, and long yellow legs that extend far beyond the tail while flying. The wings are long and pointed, and when in flight, the white tail and white wing patches are well visible. Both sexes look alike throughout the year. During the breeding season, which occurs in the spring and summer, the White-tailed Lapwing is found in wetlands, marshes and the edges of lakes and rivers. Along with other waterside species, like the Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, Pratincoles *Glareola* sp., and Terns (Sterninae), they typically form small colonies in such areas. In both, their breeding and wintering grounds, the White-tailed Lapwings prefer salty or semi-saline marshes and riverbanks with little vegetation where they nest on the ground in shallow depressions (Delany et al. 2009; Wiersma and Kirwan 2020). A possible range expansion has been documented in recent years, with recent confirmed breeding records from Romania, Armenia, and Cyprus (Kiss and Szabó 2000; Ananian et al. 2002; Wiersma and Kirwan 2020; Aghababyan 2021; Kiss et al. 2022). Lately, it has also been recorded breeding in Gujarat (north-west India) (Mori and Sidani 2017).

White-tailed Lapwing is classified as an irregular visitor in Georgia (Budagashvili and Javakhishvili 2024). Only 12 records were documented between 1984–2023 (Abuladze 2019), whereby we consider a series of seven observa-



Figures 1. A: The nesting habitat of the White-tailed Lapwings (*Vanellus leucurus*) in the vicinity of the Kumisi Lake; **B**: White-tailed Lapwing, territorial flight; **C**: The nest of the White-tailed Lapwing; **D**: The nest of the Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*).

tions on the Black Sea coast in April-May 2022 concerned repeated observations of the same flock of 6 individuals observed in small groups or solitary individuals around the Chorokhi river delta near Batumi and Maltakva river mouth near Poti for about a month. The locations where White-tailed Lapwings have been observed in Georgia are mostly inland lakes and reservoirs as well as the Black Sea coast (Fig. 2). The breeding attempt discussed below represents the first documented breeding attempt in the country and a possible range expansion of White-tailed Lapwing from the neighbouring countries.

Status in the adjacent countries

Azerbaijan. According to Patrikeev (2004) (also Z Fərəcli pers. comm.), the White-tailed Lapwing was a rare breeder in Azerbaijan, with the first breeding record in the early 1950s. In the subsequent years, the species expanded within the country, with the first breeding recorded in Aghgol National Park in 1962. By the late 1980s, the estimated number of breeding pairs in the country was fewer than 100 pairs.

Armenia. The first record of White-tailed Lapwing in Armenia was from Armash fishponds in July 1989. The first possible breeding was found in late May of 1999. One year later the species was found presumably incubating at the same location (Armash fishponds) in late May 2000. The breeding was finally confirmed on 9 June 2001 (Ananian et al. 2002). According to Aghababyan (2021), the population of the White-tailed Lapwing is restricted to Ararat Plain, within the Armash Wetlands, and the most recent estimate of the Armenian population is 74–89 breeding pairs.

Türkiye. The first breeding White-tailed Lapwings in Türkiye were found in the 1970s, at least around five different sites (Kasparek 1992). According to the Turkish Breeding Bird Atlas there are only a few known breeding locations of White-tailed Lapwings in Türkiye, and the abundance is thought to be 0-9 pairs (Boyla et al. 2019).

Russia. The breeding of the White-tailed Lapwing was seen in southern Russia in the west of the Volga river, close to the Russia-Kazakhstan border (Belik 1989; Arkhipov 2006).

Materials and methods

The potential nesting area was checked by the spotting scope (Swarovski ATX 25-60x85) and binoculars (ZEISS Victory 10x42 mm, Swarovski Optik EL Swarovision Binocular, 10x42 mm) from a safe distance. Additionally, digital DSLR cameras and mobile phones were used to document the species, nests, and habitat. After discovering the territorial individual possibly protecting the incubating pair, the approximate distance and location to the possible nest were determined to check and confirm breeding. The potential territorial behaviour of the pair has been observed for half an hour. Additionally, personal communications have been sourced from one other observer, who observed six individuals of the species around the same location.

Results

As the first observation in 2024, two White-tailed Lapwings were reported to be seen in the Gardabani municipality on Kumisi Lake, Kvemo Kartli region (Fig. 2), by the visiting birdwatchers Gheorghe Ticu, Jonathan Hecke, and Florian Klingel on 16 May. The next day, another observation was made by another group of visiting birdwatchers, Nayib Hamdoun, Fernando Casado Angulo, and Miguel Pérez Sainz, who initially reported possible breeding. The next observation was made by Giorgi Natsvlishvili, who observed six individuals on 23 May.

Our observations. In total, four individuals of the White-tailed Lapwings were seen by us on 27 May 2024, close to Kumisi Lake. The birds were observed in a colony of breeding Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus)*, and Northern Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*). While observing the pair from a distance, from dense bushes, without causing any disturbance, the territorial behaviour of the White-tailed Lapwing was seen. The territorial pair was chasing away Black-winged stilts walking close to the possible incubating pair/nest. Agitated behaviour was also observed when White-tailed Lapwing started to chase flying Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) from its territory. In addition to observing territorial behaviour, one individual was observed sitting on the nest. The presence of the species was also checked and confirmed on 8 June (2 individuals, still on the nest) and 6 July (6 individuals).

Habitat. The breeding pair was observed in the close vicinity of a shallow standing pond and a slow-flowing creek, close to the reservoir (Kumisi) (Fig. 1A), an area flooded during the rainy season that is characterised by dried-out marshy meadows and salt-shrub terrain during the breeding period. The nest was found in a damp, tenuously vegetated area near salt water. Two nests were found, one of which belonged to the White-tailed Lapwing (Fig. 1C). Unlike

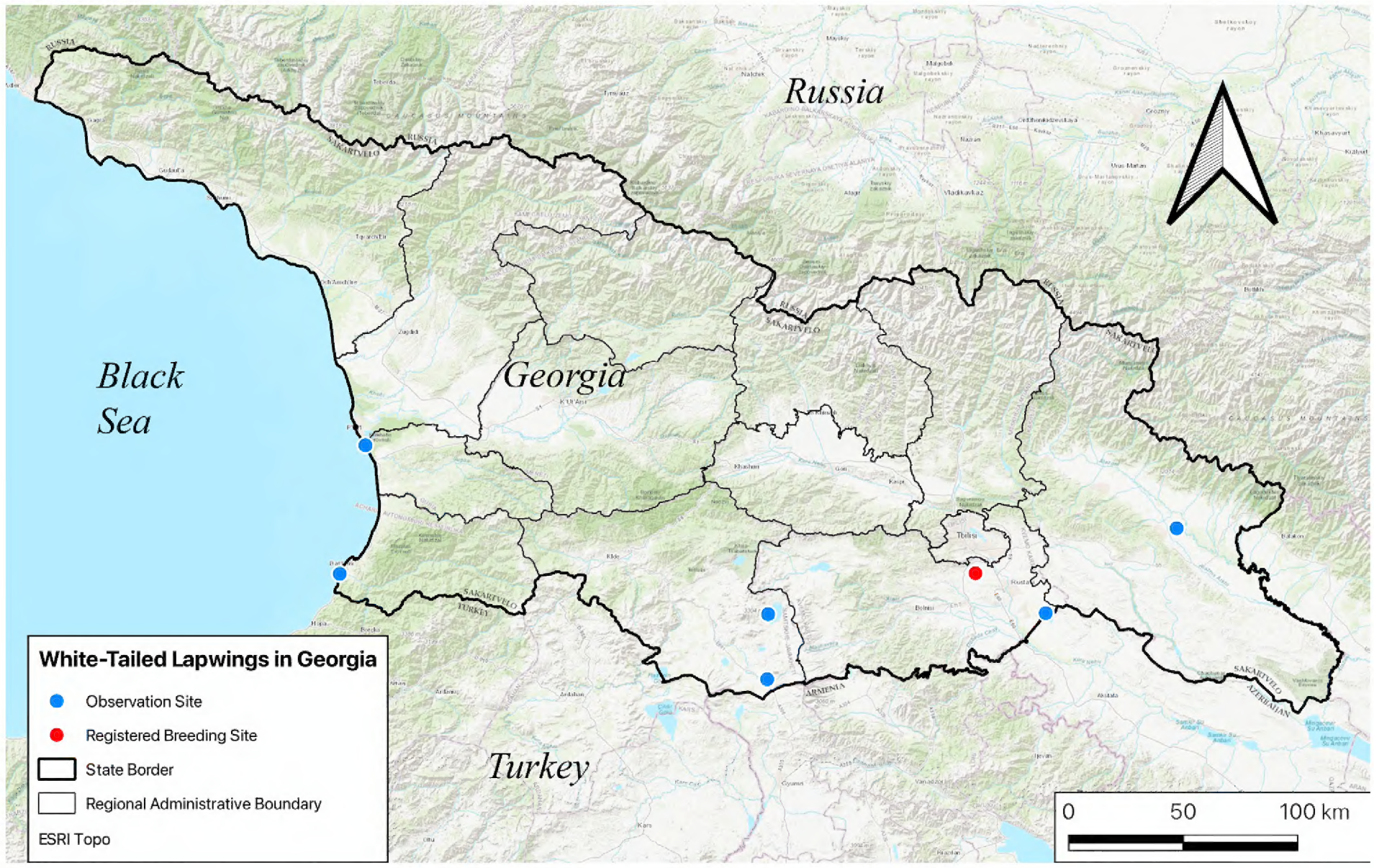
Table 1. Details regarding the presence of White-tailed Lapwings (*Vanellus leucurus*) in Georgia from 1984 to 2023.

Number of recorded individuals	Location of the observation	Date of the observation	Source/observers
5	Paravani Lake	18.08.1984	Abuladze 2019
2	Alazani river valley	28.10.1991	Abuladze 2019
1	Madatapa Lake	24.05.2003	Abuladze 2019
1	Chorokhi River Delta	01.05.2012	Roland Schlegel
1	Jandari Lake	21.09.2016	Kristof Goemaere, Olivier Dochy, Kristof Goemaere
2	Gurjaani Fishpond	05.04.2019	Zakro Songhulashvili
1	Shida Kartli	15.04.2021	Alexander Abuladze
1	Jandari Lake	05.09.2021	Christian Goenner
1	Chorokhi River Delta	13.04.2022	Tohar Tal, Erik Jansen, Marc Heetkamp
2	Kumisi Lake	17.04.2022	Christian Goenner, Asmus Schröter
6	Chorokhi River Delta	28.04.2022	Nika Budagashvili, Zura Gurgenidze
2	Maltakva River mouth	30.04.2022	Nika Budagashvili, Zura Gurgenidze
3	Chorokhi River Delta	30.04.2022	Nika Budagashvili, Zura Gurgenidze
2	Chorokhi River Delta	01.05.2022	Erik Jansen, Marc Heetkamp
4	Chorokhi River Delta	06.05.2022	Erik Jansen, Marc Heetkamp
2	Chorokhi River Delta	09.05.2022	Erik Jansen, Marc Heetkamp
1	Chorokhi River Delta	13.05.2022	Erik Jansen, Marc Heetkamp, Elien Hoekstra
2	Jandari Lake	18.04.2023	David Berten, Wouter Van Gompel, Raf Plas
1	Chorokhi River Delta	25.04.2023	Natalia Pytigina
2	Jandari Lake	27.04.2023	Asmus Schröter

Black-winged Stilts, the nest of the White-tailed Lapwing consisted of a sparse lining of plant material and four eggs with a coloration of buff to yellow-buff with dark brown markings. The nest of the Black-winged Stilt contained more vegetation (grass fibers and small sticks) (Fig. 1D), more shell fragments, and eggs that were cream-coloured and mottled brown-grey, as noted in the literature (Harrison and Castell 2002; Maleko et al. 2023). Additional observations from a safe distance have been made after checking the nesting territory, and the nesting pair was back after 5-10 minutes at the initial location where they had been discovered, and one of the pairs continued incubation.

Discussion

Kumisi Lake provides an important habitat as a stop-over site during the migration for Charadriiformes and other bird species. There are several notable bird species that are observed using the lake or the vicinity of the lake, such as Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), Greater Sand Plover (*Anarhynchus leschenaultii*), Eurasian Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*), Terek Sandpipers (*Xenus cinereus*), Broad-billed Sandpipers (*Calidris falcinellus*), Red-footed Falcons (*Falco vespertinus*), Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*), etc. The lake is more important as a wintering location for many waterfowl species, as when the lakes on the Javakheti Plateau are frozen in winter, most of the wintering waterfowl search for other resting places nearby. Kumisi Lake provides habitat for the globally vulnerable Common Pochards (*Aythya ferina*) (BirdLife International 2021) and ca. 25000 Eurasian coots (*Fulica atra*) for already two years in a row. There are also occasional observations of the globally endangered White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), on the lake. All of these highlight the regional importance of the lake.



Figures 2. Distribution of the White-tailed Lapwing in Georgia.

As of today, the lake is not protected by Georgian law and is a well-known hunting spot locally. As a habitat for breeding, Kumisi Lake is considered less significant, but it still provides small populations of some local species. As a waterside species, Black-winged stilts are nesting around the lake in small colonies. Occasionally, Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*) also breed on the lake, as well as Great-crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*), Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Black-necked Grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*), and Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*). The newly discovered nesting White-tailed Lapwing is an important addition to the breeding birds of the lake and country, and to consider that the species became a common breeder in its originally discovered locations in the adjacent countries after the first confirmation, additional conservation efforts are required in Georgia. Therefore, we recommend strengthening the legal protection of the lake to preserve newly established species on the lake and maintain a stable future population as it expanded and increased in the neighbouring countries (Ananian et al. 2002; Patrikeev 2004; Aghababyan 2021).

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Additional information

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Ethical statement

No ethical statement was reported.

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Author contributions

All authors have contributed equally.

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Data availability

All of the data that support the findings of this study are available in the main text or Supplementary Information.

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